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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses several aspects of the need for research in communication education for black children. Initial comments underline the need for educating teachers in communication behavior and teaching methods. The complex nature of the problem under review indicates the need for careful delineation of the problem for effective research and clear distinctions between the structure and function of black children's language. The role of learning interference must also be determined. There is a growing mandate for accountability in such research, because inaccurate research has fostered hostility and resentment. The researcher must contemplate the need for justifying the research to the researched, lest he subject himself to the accusation of the acquisition of data pursuant to re-making it into another group's image. (Author/VM)

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IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH IN COMMUNICATION EDUCATION FOR THE BLACK CHILD

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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INTRODUCTION

Speech communication education is a vital yet highly complex, wide ranging subject. The commissioned papers of the SAA Summer Conference are dramatic evidence of a vital yet highly complex subject, "Speech Communication Education." A quote will best document the enormous task of the respondent's role.

> The general topic of "communication" and its functional analysis, like that of the functional analysis of speech, is a vital one and yet at the same time diffuse, so far as development and representation in the scientific and scholarly literature is concerned.
>
> Assumptions and preferences as to the various functions of speech are at once a fundamental problem of general linguistics and the study of language universals and a determinant of activity in linguistics proper and the analysis of communication generally, as well as a guide to explicating major differences of approach.[1]

Attempts to isolate and focus on certain theoretical positions are dictated by (1) the impossibility of adequately treating so complex a subject in order to meet the exigencies of my assignment, and (2) the directions of the implications and their underlying assumptions. Woods and Williams papers represent similar positions in the advocacy of a "functional approach", and my response attempts to cojoin the two papers for purposes of discussing the communication education of Black children.[2]

[1] Hymes Dell (ed.). Language in Culture and Society. Harper & Row New York, 1964. Pp. 109-110.

[2] Black is capitalized at the suggestion of the professional organization Afro-American Educators.

COMMUNICATION EDUCATION FOR WHOM?

An underlying assumption of the papers is that teachers are themselves effective communicators competent to behaviorally translate research findings into practical application. It seems of utmost priority that research focus on the communication behavior of teachers as well as Black and minority children. The teacher is still the major factor in classroom instruction. According to Taylor, (1970) there is mounting evidence, e.g. the BALA Project, that teachers of linguistically different children are either "ineffective communicators" or communicate exceedingly well a belief in the child's inferiority.[3] Labov has pointed out that the fundamental situation is one of reciprocal ignorance between teacher and student.[4] The teacher is often ignorant of the communication rules she employs.

Teacher and student communication behavior intersect. Theoretical notions which omit provisions for research of the teacher as change agent in the teacher-learning process will leave unstudied a significant distinction. Schools are staffed with and continue to be assigned, teachers who know little or nothing about the nature and function of language. In spite of the fact that large bodies of information on the aspects of language have been available for a considerable time, recognition of the need for inclusion of that

3 Dr. Orlando Taylor's speech at the Central States Speech Association Convention, The Sherman House, Chicago, Illinois. April 11, 1970.

4 William Labov, "Some Sources of Reading Problems for Negro Speakers of Non-Standard English" in New Directions in Elementary English, Alexander Frazier (ed.). National Council of Teachers of English. Champaign, Illinois. 1967.

knowledge in teacher training and classroom instruction has been slow.

My observations as a consultant to numerous school systems have led me to conclude that, generally, teachers possess faulty, folk-lorish knowledge about communication behavior. They do not seem to know much about language acquisition, linguistic diversity, nor how to state a communication objective. There is no evident discrimination between teaching an activity and teaching a specific skill.

Pre-service teachers need at the first level, to acquire knowledge about the aspects, nature and functions of language in communication. At the second level, teachers need training in the requirements of effective communication for themselves, including the demonstration of competence in classroom application. Such training could be considered as a component of practice teaching or an internship supervised by a communication educator.

In-service teachers present a more complex problem of re-education at the first level. The complexity of knowledge now available in the area of language and communication obviates the "self-taught" method of dissemination. The possibilities of misconceptions, misinterpretation and confusion are boundless. Field workers utilizing my experimental "Ethnolinguistic Model"[5] have impressed upon me and others the necessity for in-service training at the first level, before curriculum modification can be implemented in practice.

Deficit theories occupy a long and honorable tradition in the education of teachers currently in practice in the schools. The deficiency model has directed the teaching of language, one of the main purposes of a language teaching method. Teachers are graduates of the correlated efforts of psychology and speech education courses promoting the myths of verbal destitution,

5 Holt, Grace. "An Ethnolinguistic Approach to Language Learning for Minority Group Children."

verbal deprivation, cultural deprivation, or and defective speech relative to Black children. It is not, then, surprising that they are very busily engaged in doing what they are convinced needs to be done. It is unrealistic to suppose that these teachers are ideally suited to translate new insights into viable pedagogy without first having been taught to expect, accept, and respect the language of Black children.

ATTITUDINAL CORRELATES

An analogy can be drawn between Kenneth Clark's explication of the "Self-fulfilling Prophesy"[6] in the education of Black children in Harlem and William's finding of linguistic bias of experienced inner-city schools. The Self-fulfilling Prophesy operates in the area of speech communication and is predictable on the basis of teacher training input, supported and buttressed by the behavior of the larger society. What experienced teachers, by and large, Black and white, represent is years of experience in the destructive application of linguistic (and other) bias. I seriously question whether materials per se create biased attitudes in teachers. It is more likely that they re-inforce superordinate-subordinate attitudinal correlates.

SOME ASPECTS OF "THE PROBLEM"

Mackay indicates that the major cause of failure of research experimentation is due to improper definitions of the problem investigated. The com-

[6] Clark, Kenneth B. Dark Ghetto. Harper & Row, New York. 1965. Pp. 127-133.

plex nature of the problem under review indicates the need for careful dilineation of the problem. Whether one approaches the problem with clearly stated distinctions between structure and function serves as a guide to understanding differences of emphasis and approach. Linguists inform us that any language or dialect has the same potential for function as any other language or dialect. Function as a theoretical term is used by researchers in different ways. The distictions between criteria for structural validity and criteria for functions of language become blurred. A merging of the two sets occurs, producing a deceptive shifting from cognition in function, to function using standard structures. The evaluative criterion seems to be some index associated with the production of standard structures. Standard structural validity is seen as evidence of effective communication function.

One possible view of Black children's language is that of a systematic, powerful, necessary means of communication. Another possible view is that of a barrier to effective cognition, concept acquisition, and communication. Black English structures are viewed as "hindering" effective communication. Kroeber's notion that function is either a purpose or a relation can be used to show that Black English structures are merely a means to a functional end. The temptation to confuse interpretive tasks is remedied by clear statements of distinction between users of the term.

THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF FUNCTION

The numerous uses to which researchers and writers put the concept of function necessitate a clarification of the concept for the unwary reader. Some of the more prevalent notions of function may prove helpful. The notion of functional diversity or variation represents a complex of issues, reflected

in the range of theoretical response. Initial lines of research endeavors present some underlying assumptions of language function and their specificity in curriculum and methodology at specific stages in education. The assumptions may be summarized as:

> Functional usage represents cultural range.
>
> Functional usage is related to situational content.
>
> Discontinuities and conflicts can occur within the range of functional use.
>
> Interference is possible at the functional level.

Hymes theory of communicative competence aims at "specifying how each social relationship entails the selection and/or creation of communicative means considered specific and appropriate to it by its participants in the range of settings function and means, and their inter-relationships as acquired by children.[7] Hymes notion that the use of multiple routines in many domains with facility at switching between parts of one's verbal repertoire, both sending and receiving,[8] is of crucial importance in the education of Black children.

Hymes identifies four functions and three correlated attitudes as aspects of functional communication variation: (1) separatist and (2) unifying jointly associated with an attitude of language loyalty, and (3) prestige function associated with language pride, and (4) a frame of difference

7
Dell Hymes, a Paper on Communicative Competence, Yeshiva University, June 7, 1966. See all Hymes bibliographic guide to communication and functions of speech in Language in Culture & Society. Harper & Row, 1964, pp. 109-111. See also Vern John's discussion of functional diversity in relation to the Basil Bernstein Model in "The Basil Bernstein Fad: A Critical Look at theories of Language and Educability. A paper presented at AAA Symposium on Culture of Poverty: November 1966, Pittsburgh.

8
Ibid.

function associated with an awareness of a norm.[9]

Torrey contends that it is cross-culture variations in the functions and significance of language that create barriers to teaching and learning.[10]

Labov observes that "It was assumed by anthropological linguists that language was used in more or less the same way, for the same functions in every culture. Exploratory studies in 'The Ethnography of Speaking' indicate that there are sharp and significant differences in the ways that language is used in different cultures... Not only are the rules for speech events culturally specific, but members share a common set of standards for evaluating verbal skills within these events."[11]

John (1966) stressed the importance of the need for differentiation between language as a communicative process and language as an intellective process, especially in the area of cognitive evaluation.[12]

Linguistic research provides ample evidence that Black children exhibit the linguistic devices provided in Black English for such functions as pluralization, grammatical closure, questioning and the like. There is no need to reiterate them here.[13]

[9]Humes, Dell H. Functions of Speech: An Evolutionary Approach. Bobbs-Merrill Reprint Series A-124. Reprinted from Anthropology and Education, Frederick C. Gruber, ed., University of Pennsylvania Press, (1961).

[10]Jane W. Torrey, "Illiteracy In the Ghetto", Harvard Educational Review. Vol. 40, No. 2 May, 1970.

[11]William Labov et al. A Study of the Non-Standard English of Negro and Puerto Rican Speakers in New York City. Cooperative Research Project No. 3288, Vol. I, Columbia University, New York 1968, pp. 14-15.

[12]John Vera. "The Basil Bernstein Fad: A Critical Look at Theories of Language and Educability." A paper presented at AAA Symposium on Cultural Poverty.

[13]See for example, Stewart, Labov, Baratz, Shuy, Wolfram, Taylor, Bailey, Kochman, Williams, and Barats.

It is not clear whether what we need to know is whether a B.E. speaker moves from a set of functional rules in situational context I to the same set of rules in a different context II, or whether he moves from functional rules in context I to a different set of rules in context II. Consideration of function as a more comprehensive theory of communicative competence must at least resolve the following issues:

> Essential and specific skills in language function essential to academic success need to be analyzed and compiled.
>
> Techniques for analysis of functional differences between Standard and Black communication need to be highly developed.
>
> Whether or not cultural repugnance may operate as a functional variable in language teaching.
>
> As Wolfram has suggested, further studies must consider the functional relation of Standard English and Black Englsh in terms of the entire spectrum of American social and racial relations.[14]
>
> Interference at the functional level must be explored.

LEARNING INTERFERENCE

"Interference", in linguistic terminology, means the negative influence of the habits of the learners native language or primary dialect in the use of a new language or alternate (second) dialect. Interference may occur in structure, stylistic variations, function, conventions, restrictions, and linguistic taboos when an alternate dialect is superposed on a speech community. Whether or not interference does occur, in what areas, and to what degree needs to be determined. When the necessary research is done, a more effective pro-

[14]Wolfram, Walter A. A Sociolinguistic Description of Detroit Negro Speech. Center for Applied Linguistics: 1969.

gram of second alternate dialect instruction could be devised for use with Black children.

ACCOUNTABILITY

It has become fashionable to use Bereiter-Engleman as the "shipping boys" of language research. It is crucial that one understand the historical forces which made the B.E. research findings possible. A cursory survey of the research literature reveals the progression, pervasiveness, and consistency with which scientific research has served as an arbiter of educational decisions, acted upon normative racist patterns, and provided educators with rationalizations for the schools' failure to educate Black children.[15] One finds Charles White's "Regular Gradation in Man" theory (1799), Dr. Samuel George Mortion's "Cranial Inferiority" (1839), N.S. Shaler's "Inferior Nature" model (1890) and Ambrose Gonzales' "Thick lips", incapable physiognomy, of 1922. Charles Fries' American English Grammar speaks of "impoverishment in language symptomatic of cultural impoverishment, less extensive inventory of prepositions and conjunctions and fewer subordinate clauses" in the forties. Eunice Shaed Newton's "Verbal destitution" label was in well-populated territory in the early sixties. Martin Deutsch speaks of the "language deficit" (1963-1968) of the underprivileged Negro. The Task Force of the N.C.T.E. (1965) recommended language programs for the child with "linguistic impoverishment", "retarded in most areas of language development", who is "unable to express himself", and who "lacks language." Raven McDavid's (1967) premise that "there

15 For a good introductory summary of racism in Early Childhood Intervention see Baratz, Stephen and Baratz, Joan. "Early Childhood Intervention: The Social Science Base of Institutional Racism." Harvard Educational Review. Vol. 40, No. 1. Winter, 1970.

is little effort to create habits of verbal interaction or word play" in Black homes. Scientific research on Blacks has always revealed differences, interpreted in varying ways according to discipline. But the interpretive message has always been the same -- different but inferior.

The historical role of research provides the perspective for the swift pervasion of early childhood language intervention programs. The hypothesis is that educators fail to educate Black children due to late access to the child. The reasoning is that if you can just get them quickly enough, the sooner they can be removed from the contamination of their own linguistic environment, and the sooner they will become the models educators deem desirable. Counteraction of the "contamination" has finally produced the ultimate, the "Inevitable Hypothesis" of Caldwell, and the Bettelheim proposal (1969) of Kibbutz's for Black children. The "back up" hypothesis prompted Sizemore to state that "the early education model is based on an assumption that the home and the parent are the worst enemies the kid could have, and the sooner you get them out of there the better off they are, and so we have an education program from the womb to the tomb."[16] The stage is now set for Jensenism (1970) and the revival of genetic inferiority as the causal factor in educational failure.

Historical perspective of language research, with its correlates on the social spectrum, permit a fuller understanding of why Blacks are forced to the notion of accountability in research via participation in the decision making process. It is reasonable that the groups studied make decisions for

[16] Barbara Sizemore speaking at the Urban Coalition Conference on Urban Education Washington, D.C., December 15, 1969. As a conference participant, I was impressed with the heavy, often volatile discussion of language programs for the disadvantaged by the conference participants.

themselves about their future.

The history of hostility and resentment spawned by inaccurate research findings produced the growing mandate for accountability. The researcher must contemplate the need for justifying to the researched the research need, lest he subject himself to the accusation of the acquisition of data persuant to re-making it into another group's image. Black (and other minorities) against oppression and rejection on one hand, and against assimilation and absorption on the other, balanced by the desire for education presents a triadic relationship for research. There is the factor of Black Identity, and there is the factor of freedom to choose the course of action which shapes a meaningful economic plan for living for one's self. Finally, there is the freedom to decide relevant language for the social goals which Blacks themselves determine. The researcher should be willing to expose his hypothesis, assumptions, rationale and conclusions to questions, criticism and even assault by the researched within the triadic framework.[17]

In this article I have attempted to determine a set of objectives I believe desirable and obtainable. I have also atempted to explain some of the variables involved in the "problem." However the main problem, is to me, the invasion by non-blacks into areas that few understand dimly, if at all. Their total incompetence in the area is evidenced by the deluge of drivel, inconsidered conclusions, distortions, and plain nonsense published under the

[17] Orlando Taylor and Grace Holt presented the rationale and discussion of this position at the Central States Speech Association Convention, April 11, 1970. See also, "Research In The Black Community: A Need for Self-Determination", by Sandra J. Garcia, Angela Blackwell, Clye E. Williams and Gary Simpkins.

protective cover of scholarship.

At this point in time nothing is more "in" than the investigation of non-white minorities, such "investigations" being rewarded by increases in prestige and more negotiable currency. The average non-white would be overcome with laughter as these weighty tomes are posed as an increase in knowledge were it not for the fact that the educational apparatus seriously considers them to be worthy, and hastily constructs "programs" based in toto on observable nonsense. If the nuances, the modes, experiences, culture and social positions of the objects under scrutiny are not fully understood, the result can only be a parody on the truth, and a barrier to any real understanding of the "problem".[18]

Those not equipped by experience and background, should not pose their conclusions as the truth, but instead should advance any opinions they might have as cautiously as a Black investigating speech vagaries in Cicero, Illinois. He may be lucky that he emerges at all, often leaving the truth far behind, a casualty of his own incompetence.

Those who are competent should conduct desired research which will ultimately permit the development of viable education programs for <u>all</u> children.

..."And I will sing your praises
and I will help you to make
the desert bear fruit."

Ralph Ellison

18 Labov, whose work is so significantly a beginning, has stated that valid research in urban ghetto areas requires <u>specific knowledge of the culture</u> and detailed knowledge of the local situation, and that success depends upon the behavior which is available only to members of the sub-culture. Vol. I, p. 18.